



[Matthew 13:3-9](#)

(3) And he spake many things unto them in parables, saying, Behold, a sower went forth to sow; (4) And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: (5) Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: (6) And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. (7) And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: (8) But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold. (9) Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.

King James Version

Jesus' first parable to the multitudes concerns a sower and his limited success in receiving fruit from the earth. Recognizing the context and audience reveals that this parable was a rebuke of the nation. It testified of the citizens' inability to receive "the word of the kingdom" (verse 19)—[the gospel](#) of the [Kingdom of God](#). It aptly describes what John the Baptist, [Jesus](#), and the apostles experienced in the first century. They saw within the people some interest—and even some willingness—to [repent](#) (after a fashion) and to [be baptized](#), but there was little depth because their hearts were so far from their King. In three out of four scenarios in the parable, the ground produced nothing of value.

Only the good soil—"he who hears the word *and understands it*" (verse 23; emphasis ours)—bears fruit. All the types of ground receive the Word, but [God](#) prepares the soil only of some. The masses lacked ears to hear, despite

claiming Abraham as their father. They looked for a messiah who would improve their political condition while leaving their religious system and moral state unchallenged.

We see this even within the context of the Parable of the Sower. The critical factor is whether the “ground” heard and received the “word of the kingdom”—that is, whether God had given those hearing the Word the means to respond properly. In Jesus' explanation of the parable to His disciples, He refers to the multitude before Him when quoting [Isaiah 6:9-10](#):

Hearing you will hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will see and not perceive; for the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.

The people to whom He gave the [parables](#) were fulfilling Isaiah's prophecy. They were living proof of the truth in this first parable—they could not receive the truth. In contrast, He had prepared His disciples to hear and respond properly. They were the good soil that would yield an increase ([Matthew 13:16-17](#); see [John 15:1-17](#)).

— David C. Grabbe

To learn more, see:

[God's Kingdom in the Parables \(Part One\)](#)

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[Hearing but not Listening](#)

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